# RESEARCH

A REPORT OF THE
PLANNING AND RESEARCH BRANCH
MANITOBA EDUCATION

Manitoba
Education

Prepared by:
Linda E. Lee
Manitoba Education
Planning and Research

This report is intended for information only,
and does not necessarily represent the policy
or opinion of Manitoba Education.

Curriculum
Implementation
in Manitoba:
Case Studies
84-03(c)

375.0097127
Lee, Linda.
Curriculum implementation in Manitoba : case studies.

(Manitoba. Manitoba Education. Planning and Research. Research ; 84-03 (c))
ISBN 0-7711-0239-9

1. Education—Manitoba—Curricula. 2. Curriculum planning--Manitoba. I. Manitoba. Manitoba Education. Planning and Research. II. Title. III. Series.

Winnipeg, Manitoba

March, 1985

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | | page |
|---|---|---|
| | Summary | |
| I. | Introduction . . . . . | 1 |
| II. | School Profiles. . . . . | 1 |
| III. | Approach to Curriculum Implementation. . . . . | 5 |
| | 1. Formal Process . . . . . | 5 |
| | 2. Roles. . . . . | 7 |
| IV. | Implementation of the Social Studies Curriculum. | 9 |
| | 1. Attitudes Towards Social Studies . . . . . | 10 |
| | 2. Preparedness to Begin Implementation . . . . | 11 |
| | 3. Factors Affecting Implementation . . . . . | 11 |
| V. | Issues Concerning the Implementation of Curricula | 14 |
| | 1. Awareness vs. Understanding. . . . . | 14 |
| | 2. Diversity. . . . . | 15 |
| | 3. Importance of Process. . . . . | 16 |
| | 4. Involvement of Staff . . . . . | 16 |


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


The case study project team would like to express their sincere thanks to the staff of the ten case study schools and divisions. Their assistance and co-operation was vital to the successful completion of this study.

# CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN MANITOBA: CASE STUDIES

## SUMMARY

As part of a major study concerning curriculum implementation in Manitoba, ten elementary schools in diverse settings were selected to participate as case study schools. Using the recently introduced social studies curriculum as an example, issues related to the curriculum implementation process were discussed with school staff. Some of the major issues arising from the case study findings are presented below:

### Awareness vs. Understanding

It cannot be taken for granted that teachers have the same assumptions as curriculum developers. In this case, teacher awareness is important; awareness of underlying assumptions should be fostered. However, understanding of the program's goals and commitment to them are necessary if teachers are to make effective use of new curricula.

### Diversity

Diversity among school situations is a reality in Manitoba. Student background, access to resources, distance among schools are only some of the variables. Not only must curriculum developers take these into account, but so must those structuring implementation strategies.

### Importance of Process

A structured process, if thoughtfully developed and used, would ensure more effective implementation and less teacher frustration. Active divisional commitment and planning, as well as knowledgeable and supportive school administrators, are two key elements in developing and implementing a successful process.

### Influencing Factors

Certain factors inherent in the implementation of social studies (ie. lack of resources, too many curricula at once) were making their impact felt on many teachers. However, factors internal to the specific school and its students (eg. student background) were also influencing teachers' ability to successfully implement curricula.

### Involvement of Staff

Related to both process and influencing factors is the important issue of staff involvement in the process. It appears that curriculum implementation is facilitated by a co-operative approach. All educational staff from superintendents, to principals, to classroom teachers, librarians, and resource teachers have a role to play. These roles are most effective when part of a collegial and co-operative process.

# L'IMPLANTATION DES PROGRAMMES SCOLAIRES AU MANITOBA : ÉTUDES DE CAS

## RÉSUMÉ

Dix écoles élémentaires de divers milieux ont servi d'échantillons aux fins de l'étude de la mise en oeuvre des programmes scolaires au Manitoba. Utilisant le nouveau programme de sciences humaines comme point de référence, on a discuté, avec le personnel des écoles, des questions touchant à la mise en oeuvre des programmes. Voici quelques-uns des principaux points qui sont ressortis de ces discussions :

### Connaissance et compréhension

Il ne peut être tenu pour acquis que les enseignants ont le même point de vue que les concepteurs des programmes. Il importe donc que l'enseignant connaisse bien les principes sur lesquels repose un programme. Il lui faut, en outre, bien comprendre les objectifs du programme et y souscrire.

### Diversité

Au Manitoba, la situation diffère d'une école à l'autre suivant le milieu social, l'accès aux ressources, la distance entre les écoles, etc. Les concepteurs de programmes et les responsables de la mise en place des mécanismes d'implantation se doivent donc de tenir compte de ces différences.

### Importance du processus

Un processus conçu de façon intelligente et pratique assurerait une implantation efficace et causerait moins de frustration chez les enseignants. Un engagement ferme et une bonne planification au niveau de la division, ainsi que l'appui de directeurs d'école bien informés sont deux facteurs clef dans l'élaboration et l'implantation des programmes.

### Facteurs importants

De nombreux enseignants ont ressenti les effets de certains facteurs inhérents à l'implantation du programme de sciences humaines (par exemple, le manque de ressources ou le chevauchement de plusieurs programmes). Cependant, d'autres facteurs liés à l'école même ou aux élèves (par exemple, le milieu social) ont aussi joué dans la mise en oeuvre des programmes.

### Collaboration du personnel

Étant donné l'importance du rôle du processus choisi et des facteurs susmentionnés dans l'implantation des programmes, la participation des enseignants est indispensable. La collaboration facilite la mise en oeuvre des programmes. Tout le personnel scolaire, depuis le directeur général jusqu'aux directeurs, enseignants, bibliothécaires orthopédagogues, ont un rôle à jouer. Ce rôle prend toute sa force dans un esprit d'équipe et de coopération.

## I. INTRODUCTION

With a number of new curricula being initiated within the last few years, curriculum implementation is an issue of growing importance in the Manitoba educational system. Therefore, as a reflection of Departmental concern, the Planning and Research Branch conducted a major study to assess the curriculum implementation process.

This study included surveys of principals and teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. The focus of the elementary teachers survey was the new social studies curriculum, while at the secondary level, 100 and 101 science were targetted. On a province-wide basis, teachers were asked about the process used to implement curriculum, and their satisfaction with it. Emphasis was placed deliberately on the implementation process rather than on the content of a particular curriculum.

As a follow-up to the survey work, ten case studies were conducted at the elementary level. The case studies were designed to focus on issues raised by the survey data, and to provide a description of how implementation occurred in specific situations. For this latter reason, the ten schools selected represented a range of situations in terms of size of the school, size of the division, region of the province, background of the students, and degree of principal inservicing. They were chosen to illustrate diverse situations, and as such, do not constitute a representative sample of all schools in Manitoba.

In each case study, the principal of the case study school and at least one teacher at each elementary grade (K-6) were interviewed. The superintendent was also interviewed, and in a number of cases other divisional personnel, such as assistant superintendents and consultants, were also included in the interview schedule. These interviews provided different perspectives on the implementation process. They form the basis of this report.

## II. SCHOOL PROFILES

In order to provide background information for the reader, a short profile of each case study school will be presented preceding the discussion of results. School names will not be used so that the anonymity of the case study schools will be preserved.

Four urban schools were selected. They were chosen from various socio-economic areas of the city. Each is in a different division.

School U1 - is situated in one of the larger urban school divisions. The school itself has an enrollment of about 450 from Kindergarten to Grade 6. As it is a dual track school, this enrollment represents students in both the English and French immersion programs. Only teachers in the English program were interviewed. It should also be noted that the school is in an upper-middle class neighbourhood where, according to 1981 census data, average family income was between $35,000 and $40,000, and where only 4% of the population over 15 years of age has less than a Grade 9 education. Incidence of low income was placed at 4%.

School U2 - is a core area school (N to 6) situated in a totally different socio-economic area than School U1. The school has an enrollment of approximately 350 students, many of whom come from Metis and Native families. Census data indicate that average family income is approximately $10,000 to $11,000. Forty-two percent of the population over 15 years of age has less than a Grade 9 education. Incidence of low income was 65%. The use of grade level teams is another distinguishing characteristic of School U2.

School U3 - is situated in one of the smaller urban school divisions. The school enrollment is also small, totalling about 200 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. The teaching staff is experienced, with no one having less than eight years experience. Census data indicate that the average family income is approximately $21,000, with the percentage of low income at 20%. The area is basically working class, but with a substantial number of students coming from core area type backgrounds. Approximately a quarter of the population over 15 years has less than a Grade 9 education.

School U4 - is a community school situated in an urban division which has a population of approximately 8,000 students. It is a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school with an enrollment of approximately 500. Average family income, as reported in 1981 census data, was approximately $24,000, or almost precisely the provincial average. Incidence of low income was reported as 19%. Approximately 15% of the population over 15 years has less than a Grade 9 education. The neighbourhood was described as multi-social and multi-cultural.

With a number of new curricula being initiated

Four rural schools were included in the case studies. Schools R3 and R4 were chosen to be as similar as possible, with the known difference being that the principal in one had attended inservicing for the new social studies, while the other principal had not. These two schools are also close to one another (within 60 kilometers).

School R1 - is situated in a town of between 4,000 and 5,000 people. The division is compact; schools are within short distances of one another. This elementary (Kindergarten to Grade 6) school has an enrollment of approximately 400 students, while divisional enrollment equals approximately 1,300. 1981 census data revealed an average family income of approximately $20,500, slightly below the provincial average. However, incidence of low income was also below the provincial average (12% vs. 14.5%). Approximately 35% of the population 15 years and older had less than a Grade 9 education.

School R2 - is situated in a larger rural division; larger both geographically and in enrollment. Divisional enrollment stands at about 2,000. Schools in this division are distant from one another, and are usually smaller in terms of enrollment. School R2, however, is one of the larger ones, having a student population of about 375 Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the elementary level there are approximately 200 students. In addition to his administrative duties, the principal also teaches. The town's population is close to the 700 mark. Census data for the municipality indicate that average family income is approximately $17,000, with incidence of low income at 26%. The area is poorer than that of School R1, and the educational level of the population is lower. Approximately one-quarter of the population 15 years and older have less than a Grade 9 education.

School R3 - is a small rural school situated in a town of about 600 people. The school encompasses Kindergarten to Grade 8, and has a total student population of about 125. Of this, there are about 85 students and five teachers at the elementary level. The division has a student population approaching 1,500. Multi-graded situations occur in the school. Census data indicate an average income of about $16,000. This is below the provincial average, but, as with a number of the other rural areas, incidence of low income is also below the provincial average.

For this town, it stands at 12%. Again, as with two of the other rural case studies, 35% of the population over 15 had less than a Grade 9 education. It should also be noted the principal here had been in the school 16 years and he had attended inservices regarding the new social studies curriculum. The principal taught, in addition to administrative responsibilities.

School R4 - is in a rural division with a population slightly over 1,500 students. The school itself has 200 students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, with about 125 students and five teachers at the elementary level. Multi-graded situations are present in the school. The town in which the school is situated has about 900 inhabitants. Census data indicate that average family income is about $21,000, with incidence of low income at approximately 8%. As with two other case study towns, 35% of the population 15 years and older had less than a Grade 9 education. The principal had been in the school 15 years. He had not attended inservices concerning the new social studies curriculum. In addition to administrative responsibilities, the principal also taught in the school.

Two northern schools were used as case studies. One is located in a small, remote town, and the other in a large northern centre.

School N1 - is situated in a remote town which has a population of approximately 225. As occurs with most rural schools, students from the town and the neighbouring area attend the school. The school's population, Kindergarten to Grade 12, numbers about 350. Of these students, 225 are in the elementary grades. Census data indicate that the average income in the area is about $10,000. In addition, 12.5% of the population have neither English nor French as their official language, and 61% of the population 15 years and older had less than a Grade 9 education. The student population is predominantly Native Canadian. Most teachers interviewed had very little teaching experience; many were first year teachers. The principal had spent three years in the school and acted as a teacher as well as a principal.

School N2 - is situated in a large northern community. All schools in the district are located in the community. The school contains Kindergarten to Grade 8, and has a population of approximately 540. Census data for the area reveal a family income of approximately $30,000, somewhat above the provincial average of $24,000. Incidence of low income was 8%, vs. 14.5% for Manitoba as a whole. Approximately 14% of the population 15 years and older had less than a Grade 9 education. It should also be noted that selected teachers in the school had piloted the new social studies program.

## III. APPROACH TO CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Two questions arise in any discussion of approaches to curriculum implementation. They are: Is there a formal process or approach?; and, What are the roles of staff within this process?

### 1. Formal Process

Generally, a formal or structured process was not evident, although some schools and divisions were moving in this direction. However, in three of the cases (R1, U2, R3), use of a structured process was observed. Each process operated to a different degree with the common feature being the active and well-defined role of the school division. Despite the process existing, respondents in each case felt they were still working towards a better system for curriculum implementation.

In the case of School R1, the division has an overall plan for the implementation of new curricula. The division encourages schools to focus on one new curriculum per year as specified in the divisional plan (eg. social studies in 1981-82). The division then supports professional development for the selected curiculum. Both teachers and the principal attended sessions given to staff of all elementary schools in the division.

The setting appears to have facilitated this division-wide process (School R1), as all schools are in one town. However, divisional recognition of the need for a process and concerted effort towards it were also necessary. For example, School N2 is also part of a division where all schools are in one community. In this situation a move towards a more formal process is occurring, but is not yet in place as it is for School R1.

In the case of U2, the division has also mapped out a schedule for implementation. A committee, (comprised of divisional administrators, principals, vice-principals, and consultants), has also defined the appropriate roles for various personnel involved in the implementation of curricula. Despite this attention to structuring a plan, strategies for a school level process and an evaluation phase are still being developed. Therefore, although a formal structure exists, actual implementation remains more school-directed than in the case of R1. Of schools R1, R3, and U2, School U2 was probably least involved in a division-wide plan. Also impacting on School U2 is its student population, which is drawn from a low low socio-economic area. Many are native children. The development of language and other basic skills takes priority over the implementation of other curricula, such as social studies.

In the case of R3, the division is currently planning the formalization of the curriculum implementation process. Although a move towards a more structured process is occurring in other divisions as well, in this case the situation was viewed as one where formalization of the existing practice is occurring rather than one where a new process is being developed. Currently, the division and school both play strong roles. The division provides inservicing for both teachers and principals. The principal is then expected to assume a leadership role to guarantee new curricula are implemented. The principal is expected to be knowledgeable about the curricula and personally supportive of the staff. The superintendent monitors implementation to ensure consistency throughout the division, and personally evaluates program delivery if time permits. This active and personal role of the superintendent is facilitated by the small number of schools and staff in the division.

It should also be noted that in some cases a structured process would exist for one curriculum but not for another, depending on the priorities of the division. For example, at least three divisions had produced a plan for the implementation of language arts (N1, N2, U4), but not for social studies. These subject specific plans were not taken as being the same as a planned process for curriculum implementation in general, although they do indicate a move towards structured implementation of curricula.

In contrast to those having formal divisional processes or plans for implementation, in some schools the implementation "process" consisted of new curriculum guides arriving in teachers' mailboxes. This was taken as the sign that a new curriculum was to be used in the classroom. This example serves to highlight the diversity of the curriculum implementation "process" across the province. School R2 is an example of this end of the continuum.

Overall, the development and use of a formal process for curriculum implementation appears to be aided by commitment and planning by the superintendent's office, involvement and support by the principal, and small numbers of staff to whom professional development and personal encouragement can be easily provided.

However, even in the case where a defined and structured approach to curriculum implementation was observed, not all teachers were consistent in their perceptions. For example, in the case of R1 where a formal functioning process was in place, some teachers did not recognize any structure or process as existing. Implementation meant using new curriculum in the classroom. Most teachers viewed implementation as a teacher-based process.

2. Roles

(a) Actors External to the School

Often the superintendent or divisional personnel would indicate their role was to provide overall direction. However, except in the cases where a structured process was in place or being developed, it was difficult to determine what this meant in practical terms. Teachers tended to view the division as an agency to supply resources and release time for inservicing.

Manitoba Education was generally viewed by teachers as the developer and supplier of curriculum. However, provision of inservicing was also regarded as a Departmental role. In a number of cases, such as School U4, it was evident that the teachers saw responsibility for new curricula moving from the Department in the development phase, to the division where resources and inservices were made available, to the principal who could assist teachers in obtaining these supports from the division, to the teachers themselves who, eventually, used the curriculum in their classrooms.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society and the faculties of education were rarely seen by anyone as having any role to play in the implementation of new curricula. The Manitoba Teachers' Society was sometimes viewed as supplying professional development opportunities. Comments on the faculties of education consistently focussed on the need for education students to be more familiar with curricula. The emphasis was on this preservice role.

(b) School Staff

As mentioned previously, teachers rarely understood implementation in terms of a conceptual process. Their orientation was practical and classroom-based: "using" curricula in the classroom. However, some teachers, such as a teacher in School R1, viewed both implementation and their own role in process terms. This teacher felt her role was to examine the curriculum, develop an understanding, begin classroom use/implementation, evaluate implementation, and discuss the process with other teachers. It should be noted that not only had this teacher attended divisional-sponsored inservicing, she and another teacher of the same grade had asked for and received time for joint unit development.

For teachers, understanding that an overall implementation process exists may be less important than awareness of the various aspects of the process. If teachers are aware of a new curriculum (eg. its goals, the resources available), aware of opportunities for related professional development, and if they recognize the need for its implementation, the development of a personal process can be achieved.

In the case studies, the perceived importance of the principal and his/her role was fairly consistent. Providing access to resources and facilitating attendance at inservicing were usually seen as appropriate roles. However, personal encouragement and support, and knowledge of the curriculum were cited less often. This may be dependent, at least in part, on the personality of the principal him/herself.

It was in School R3, where an implementation process was being formalized, that the principal had attended inservices on the social studies curriculum. Having the principal familiar with and knowledgeable about the curriculum seemed to facilitate easier and fuller implementation in School R3 than in the comparable example, School R4.

It appears from the case studies (as well as from the related literature), that it is the principal who must be cognizant of a larger process. The principal must provide the link between the divisional plan and classroom implementation. This requires that the principal be involved in, or at least knowledgeable of divisional plans and priorities, that the principal be familiar with new curricula, and that the principal be supportive and encouraging to his/her staff. Ideally, this involvement should take many forms from moral support to supporting and advertising professional development activities for staff.

From a teacher's perspective, actors within the school were the ones viewed as having the largest role to play in the implementation process. Manitoba Education and school division were seen as having important, but more specific roles. Teachers rarely felt the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the faculties of education had any role.

It appears, however, that not only is the principal a crucial actor, but that in order for curriculum implementation to be successful, the school division must provide real direction and planning.

## IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Social studies was used as an example of a newly implemented curriculum at the elementary level. However, some information about attitudes towards the social studies curriculum itself was sought.

## 1. Attitudes Towards Social Studies

Overall, more than two-thirds of the teachers interviewed believed there was a need for a change in the former curriculum. In only one urban school (School U3), were the majority of teachers opposed to the change. Teachers who favoured the change did so because of the increased Canadian content, more up-to-date material, and because it was more student oriented. The teachers who preferred the former curriculum gave reasons that it was more concrete, more knowledge-based, and easier to teach. Teachers in urban schools appeared more likely to favour the former curriculum.

Virtually all teachers possessed or had access to the appropriate grade level curriculum guides. In a few cases, a teacher had never seen any guide or thought that a text constituted the curriculum guide. The majority of teachers had seen the interim guide, but many thought that with the advent of the grade level guides, the interim became obsolete.

For those familiar with both guides, the grade level guide was preferred to the interim. The interim guide was criticized as being too vague and confusing. It appears that, in future, better communication regarding the purposes of different guides is necessary. It should also be noted that the recent science and health curriculum guides for elementary schools were often mentioned as model guides.

Almost universally, teachers complained that suggested support materials and resources were unavailable. Suggested materials were generally difficult to acquire, while for some units, relevant support material did not exist. In northern communities and the inner city school, the comment was also made that they were unsuitable for the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the student population. In two rural schools (both approximately 300 kilometers from Winnipeg), the issue of resources for multi-graded situations was also raised.

Opinions of suggested teaching strategies also varied according to region. Rural and northern schools expressed more satisfaction and indicated strategies were more helpful than did their urban counterparts. The primary criticism made by urban teachers again related to a lack of concreteness or a predisposition to be too idealistic.

2. Preparedness to Begin Implementation

In the majority of cases, teachers did not feel well prepared to begin implementation. Often they did not feel familiar enough with the content and/or teaching strategies of the new curriculum. In the cases where a formal process was apparent, teachers tended to feel better prepared. This correlation, however, did not extend to the amount of inservicing. Some teachers who had attended inservices or workshops were left feeling ill-prepared, often because of the perceived poor quality of the session.

Many teachers had not had any inservicing, while some had participated in orientation sessions, some had attended small schools inservices, and others had worked in grade level groupings. It appeared that teachers who had received a short introductory session, plus the opportunity to plan and develop units with a colleague, were the most confident and the most committed to the new curriculum.

Another approach, although not used initially, was being tried in School N2. Teachers worked in grade level teams to rank the curriculum's objectives in order of priority. This gave teachers more confidence in using the curriculum. It also provided more continuity between grades, as teachers subsequently shared their grade priorities with teachers teaching the grades immediately before and after.

Some teachers who, initially, did not feel well-prepared, gained confidence and knowledge through structured exercises in which they were active participants.

3. Factors Affecting Implementation

School staff were questioned about factors that influenced their ability to implement the social studies curriculum. Although some factors were mentioned by virtually all schools, other factors emerged as a result of the specific school situations.

(a) Frequently Cited Negative Factors

Mentioned in virtually all cases as a negative factor was the issue of too many new curricula in too short a time. Teachers often found it difficult to become familiar with all curricula; administrators raised the issue of the high cost of new materials. Also cited consistently as a negative factor was the lack of texts and resources or support material. In both northern schools, as well as two urban schools (Schools U2 and U4), material was also viewed as inappropriate. This was a reflection of the native, or in the case of U4, multicultural background of the students. Teachers felt that the scarcity of resource material and/or appropriate support material hindered their ability to implement fully the social studies curriculum.

In about half the schools, the fact teachers felt they did not have sufficient time to teach all of the curriculum was frequently mentioned. In two of the cases, again Schools U2 and U4, other subjects, such as language arts, were given higher priority.

(b) School Specific Negative Factors

Some negative factors were apparent in specific school situations. For example, space was a concern in two urban schools. In these schools, (U1 and U2), a combination of an older building and a substantial enrollment, resulted in larger classes and a lack of space. In the case of School U2, the team teaching situation also created larger classes. With larger classes and limited space, teachers felt it was difficult to have students participate in the suggested activities.

In two of the rural schools, R3 and R4, school staff felt that the multi-graded nature of some classes had an impact on curriculum implementation. It was suggested that multi-graded situations be taken into account when curriculum is developed.

In another case, a primary teacher cited an unexpected factor which influenced her ability to implement the social studies program: the weather. She explained that in a northern community it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to take students out to explore the community as the social studies curriculum suggests. It is just too cold during the winter and visibility is often poor.

(c) Other Factors

The background of the students was almost always mentioned as an influencing factor. Sometimes it was cited as a negative influence on curriculum implementation, sometimes as a positive factor, and sometimes as both. Where students come from very low socio-economic status families, it was perceived as negative. These students do not come to school with the wealth of knowledge and experience students from higher socio-economic backgrounds do. As would be expected in higher socio-economic areas, teachers saw student background as a positive influence. Where there was a multi-cultural situation, teachers felt this both helped and hindered their ability to implement the social studies curriculum.

Support of other school staff was mentioned in almost all schools as a positive factor impacting on implementation. In one case, the librarian's knowledge of the curriculum and her supportiveness was cited. In one case, neither the principal nor other teachers were frequently viewed as having any influence on the process of implementation. In this case, in fact, there had been no implementation process; the guides had just arrived in teachers' mailboxes, and there had been little divisional inservicing support. In this situation, implementation became a very teacher-centered and non-supported activity.

Good community support was mentioned by staff in School U4 as having a positive effect on the implementation process. This school is designated a community school.

There were factors inherent in the implementation of new curriculum at this time (ie. lack of resources, too many curricula at once), which were impacting on many of the teachers interviewed. However, factors internal to the specific school, and factors relating to the school's catchment area were also viewed as influencing the teacher's ability to implement the new social studies curriculum successfully.

## V. ISSUES CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULA

Examination of the case studies raises a number of issues relevant to the curriculum implementation process in general, and specifically to the implementation of curricula in Manitoba. For discussion purposes, the issues have been grouped under four headings. This grouping does not deny the very real and important inter-relationship among all aspects of the implementation process. It does, however, attempt to provide a focus for some of the more major issues surfacing from this particular segment of the curriculum implementation study.

### 1. Awareness vs. Understanding

Much discussion takes place around the "awareness" stage of the curriculum implementation process. However, it appears from the case study findings that there are some clarifications required concerning "awareness."

Teachers were universally "aware" of the existence of new social studies curriculum. Most had some familiarity with the goals, and the vast majority were following the grade level guide. However, this type of awareness appeared, in many cases, to lead to a somewhat superficial adoption of the curriculum. In many cases the new content had been adopted and was being used. The more important steps of understanding of, and commitment to, the goals of the program did not necessarily follow. This has certain implications for professional development related to curriculum implementation. The need for teachers to take part actively in professional development activities rather than playing a passive role - (in one instance a workshop consisted of a lecture on a TV monitor) - is apparent.

There are some aspects of the implementation process, however, where actual awareness should be emphasized. For example, many teachers felt an interim guide is something to be discarded once grade level guides appear. In the case of social studies, the interim guide was designed to serve a different purpose from the grade level guides. Teachers did not know this.

General awareness of another factor would also have been beneficial. Many teachers felt they did not have enough time to "cover" all the material in the grade level guide. Greater awareness and understanding of the role of curriculum guides and of integration possibilities appear to be needed.

It cannot be taken for granted that all teachers will make the same assumptions as the curriculum developers. These assumptions should be made explicit. Therefore, awareness of the underlying assumptions should be fostered, while understanding of the program's goals and commitment to them are necessary if teachers are to move towards full implementation.

2. Diversity

The case studies served to reinforce what is common knowledge, but not always the basis for common practice: diversity among schools across Manitoba. Student background, access to resources, classroom organization, distance among schools, and even climate, are only some of the variables found among schools. (Another example: In the social studies assessment, many elementary students in one northern community incorrectly identified a grain elevator as a head shaft for a mine.)

Not only must curriculum developers take these factors into account, but so must those structuring implementation strategies. Divisions must be assisted in establishing implementation structures suitable to the realities of their particular, and often unique, situations.

3. Importance of Process

Teachers may never see curriculum implementation in process terms. They may not need to. However, it is crucial that divisions, possibly with assistance from Manitoba Education, move towards a planned process for the implementation of new curriculum. Not that all teachers will, or perhaps should, achieve full implementation of all curricula; however, a structured process, if thoughtfully developed and used, would ensure better implementation and less frustration for classroom teachers.

It appears that active divisional commitment to implementation, as well as knowledgeable and supportive school administrators are two of the key elements in developing and implementing a successful process.

4. Involvement of Staff

Closely related to the key elements mentioned above, is the issue of staff involvement in the process. This goes further, however, than specific roles for the division and school administration. Support should also come from others in the school such as the school librarian. (This is recognized in the plan of one of the urban school divisions used in this study.) Resources, at least in the minds of teachers, are important to their ability to implement curricula successfully. Librarians and resource teachers can both play important roles by assisting with the acquisition of resources for use with regular and/or special needs students.

Also discussed earlier was the need for commitment to the goals and use of the curriculum by classroom teachers. Teachers themselves appeared most enthusiastic about the use of new curricula when they had been actively involved in professional development activities. This active involvement almost invariably took the form of working with colleagues. Even if this had not occurred, many teachers expressed a desire for the opportunity to work co-operatively in grade level groups to discuss and develop strategies for classroom use.

It appears that implementation of curricula can be facilitated by a co-operative approach. All educational staff from superintendents, to principals, to classroom teachers, librarians, and resource teachers have a role to play. These roles, however, appear most effective when they are part of a collegial and co-operative process.

These are some of the issues and directions suggested by exploration of the ten case studies. Examination of the survey data generated as another part of this curriculum implementation study, provides an overall look at these and other issues on a province-wide basis.